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## Is Lebanon part of Israel's promised territory?

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[The Torah](#) verses convey profound messages that we can insightfully extract for our daily lives. Rabbi Shay Tahan, the Rosh Kollel of Shaarei Ezra in Brooklyn, NY, graciously opens the gates to understand them.

The recent conflict in [Lebanon](#) raises the age-old question regarding the northern borders of biblical Eretz Yisrael. Where exactly did Hashem define the boundaries, and are we obligated to conquer those areas? Do the [mitzvot](#) of terumah and ma'aser apply to those lands as part of Eretz Yisrael, or are they considered outside the borders?

The Torah provides clear guidelines regarding the areas we were commanded to conquer when taking possession of the land.

In the last generation, the term "Greater Israel" has come to the forefront. It is sometimes used in political or religious discussions about the ideal or future borders of Israel, often in the context of messianic or Zionist aspirations. Some interpret it as a call for the re-establishment of Israel's biblical borders. However, the concept varies in meaning, ranging from symbolic or spiritual interpretations to literal geographical claims.

This term refers to the concept of the biblical boundaries of the Land of Israel as promised to the Jewish people in various parts of the Torah. It is often associated with the land described in the Covenant with Avraham (Brit Bein HaBetarim), which stretches from the "River of Egypt" (interpreted by some as the Nile or a smaller river in Sinai) to the Perat River. This expansive region includes parts of modern-day Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Iraq.

When Hashem promised Avraham Avinu the Land of Israel at the Brit Bein HaBetarim, the pasuk says (בראשית טז): "On that day, Hashem made a covenant with Avram, saying: To your descendants, I have given this land—from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates."

At the blessing at the end of Parshat Ekev, Hashem tells us that we are granted every land we will conquer within the borders mentioned. In the north, the Torah states: "Every place where the sole of your foot will tread shall be yours—from the wilderness and **the Lebanon**, from the river—the Euphrates River—until the western sea shall be your boundary." This promise from the Creator clearly places the land of Lebanon within the Promised Land of Israel, or what some refer to as "the Complete Land of Israel", or "The greater Israel".

The Ramban wrote that Lebanon is within the borders of Israel and adds that we were obligated and commanded to conquer it.

Sefer Yehoshua begins with Hashem speaking to Yehoshua and repeating the above command: "Every place your foot will step has been given to you, as I spoke to Moshe—from the desert and Lebanon until the great river, the Euphrates."

The Tribe of Asher is mainly associated with regions that include parts of Lebanon. Following the conquest of the land under Yehoshua, the tribes established their territories, with Asher extending into areas adjacent to Lebanon. The text describes the border of the Tribe of Asher, detailing sections of borders and lists of cities, some of which are border cities that mark the tribe's boundary. Within the inheritance of the Tribe of Asher lies the Valley of Acco, north of Mount Carmel, with its northernmost point in the city of Sidon.

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The extension of the Land of Israel to include additional territories, such as in

the concept of "Greater Israel," has several potential halachic implications. These mainly revolve around commandments that are tied specifically to the land, known as mitzvot hateluyot ba'aretz- (mitzvot dependent on the land). Some key halachic implications include:

1. **Mitzvot Dependent on the Land:** Certain agricultural commandments apply only in the Land of Israel. These include:

- **Shmitta** (the sabbatical year where the land must rest every seven years).
- **Terumot and Ma'aserot** (tithes given to the Kohanim, Levites, and the poor).
- **Orlah** (the prohibition of eating fruits from trees during the first three years of their growth).

Expanding Israel's borders would mean extending the requirement to observe these mitzvot in the newly included territories.

2. **Two days of Yomtov:** There is a difference between those who live within the borders of Israel, who observe one day of Yom Tov, and those living outside, who keep two days. Accordingly, if the land were to extend to the greater borders of Israel, this distinction would apply. (According to halacha that follows the Ritva א"ר, סוכה מג, א; ר"ה יח, א; arguing on the Rambam (רמב"ם הל' קדוש החודש ה, ט-יב)
3. **Inhabitants and Settlement:** According to some opinions, living in the biblical boundaries of Eretz Yisrael may be considered a mitzvah. Expanding Israel's borders could extend the obligation for Jews to settle and inhabit those areas.
4. **Traveling Outside the land:** One may not leave the boundaries of Eretz Yisrael if they dwell there, except for learning Torah, getting married, or for their livelihood. Therefore, they can travel to those extra territories if they are conquered.
5. **War and Conquest:** The concept of milchemet mitzvah (a commanded war) includes conquering certain territories that were promised in the Torah. If new land is identified as part of the biblical borders, there may be halachic discussions about the obligation to conquer and settle it.

The River Perat, commonly identified with the Euphrates River, is situated in the Middle East. It flows through several countries, including Turkey, Syria, and Iraq, before emptying into the Persian Gulf. In biblical contexts, the Euphrates River is often mentioned as a significant boundary in the promises made to the Jewish people regarding the Land of Israel.

If one looks at a map, they will be astounded by how far north this river extends and how vast the Land of Israel truly is. While we may not be able to reclaim all of it in our time, Hashem will surely return it to us soon.

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